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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 29 October 2003, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Loedel ..... (Uruguay)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 86: Questions relating to information *(continued)* (A/58/21, A/58/175, A/58/16 (chap. III, sect. B, programme 23) and A/58/90, annex)

1. **Mr. Ononye** (Nigeria) said that, within the context of the process of revitalizing the United Nations to comply with the provisions of the Millennium Declaration, the Department of Public Information should be provided with the funds it needed to enable it to cope with its increasing responsibilities. Despite the growing world demand for information and publicity about the activities of the United Nations, the digital divide between the industrialized world and the developing countries continued to widen, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. His delegation therefore wished to urge the developed world to coordinate better and increase its assistance to the developing countries, in order that they might benefit from the innovations in the area of information technology.

2. The quality of the services provided by the Department had improved markedly since its restructuring, particularly in the dissemination of information in support of the causes of self-determination, sustainable development, peacekeeping, the eradication of poverty and of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, tuberculosis and malaria. The determination of the Department to disseminate the ideals and goals of the New Partnership for Africa Development was praiseworthy, although it would also be desirable for it to use its publications Africa Recovery and Afrique Relevance to mobilize the international community's support for the New Partnership.

3. The United Nations should participate more in implementing Member States' information- technology policies and programmes by establishing closer and more effective ties with local authorities. Specifically, the Organization's information centres should be devoted more actively to the dissemination of information among the population by making effective use of radio. Hi Government welcomed the success achieved in the rationalization of the information centres in Western Europe and the creation of a regiona1 hub, although the establishment of regional hubs in Africa should be carried out prudently, owing to the special characteristics of that continent.

4. **Mr. Khomenko** (Ukraine) said that in the context of the reorientation of the Organization's public-information activities his delegation wished to commend the Department of Public Information for its efforts to update the United Nations website and make it more informative and functional. A successful example in that regard was the reconfiguration of the News Centre, an excellent source of information on the latest developments in the system and a gateway to a wide array of links to in-depth resources related to news of the day. The e-mail news service directly provided journalists, researchers and the general public, especially in countries in which the Internet was not yet widely available, with rapid access to the latest news about the United Nations and could be viewed as an important step towards bridging the digital divide. The live-radio project was one of the most noteworthy successes of the restructuring of the Department, since radio continued to be one of the most far-reaching and cost-effective traditional media of communication and a valuable instrument for the activities of the United Nations in the areas of development and peacekeeping.

5. His delegation supported the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Department to modernize and integrate the library services of the United Nations, since they would provide direct electronic access to the wealth of global information resources with a view to the exchange of knowledge. It welcomed the strengthening of the links between the Department and non-governmental organizations, which were playing a more and more important role in the decision-making process at the local and international levels, and it wished to commend the Department's activities in coordinating special events and programmes, in particular the celebration of World Press Freedom Day.

6. The Department was playing an important role in the Organization's peacekeeping and peace-building activities, which had become more far-reaching and complex during the past ten years and deserved full recognition by the international community. In that connection his delegation welcomed the work done by the Department to celebrate 29 May for the first time as the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, with the aim of paying tribute to all

those who had served and continued to serve in United Nations peacekeeping operations and honouring the memory of all those who had, in the course of such operations, lost their lives in the cause of peace.

7. The development of his country was hampered by the long-standing consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. The human and ecological rehabilitation of the contaminated areas, which constituted 10 per cent of its territory, was consuming vast amounts of financial and material resources, and the damage suffered exceeded $US130 billion. Although the new United Nations strategy on Chernobyl had provided a constructive framework for reinvigorating international cooperation on Chernobyl, a number of its important programmes and projects still lacked funding, and his delegation therefore urged the Department to continue providing objective information on the scope of the consequences of that disaster.

8. Lastly, he reaffirmed his Government's conviction that freedom of the press was a cornerstone of democracy. Fifty-five years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it still had not come to be universally applied. Regrettably, more than 50 journalists had been killed during the current year, and the number of attacks against journalists was still growing. In that connection, the Committee's programme should include appropriate consideration of measures aimed at preventing attacks against journalists in areas of armed conflict.

9. **Mr. Ali** (Sudan) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and he stressed the importance of giving equal opportunity to the official languages of the United Nations in the area of public information, especially with regard to the situation of Arabic on the United Nations website, so as to promote the confidence inspired by the United Nations among the citizens of the world and to ensure the equitable distribution of its activities among all States.

10. It was of the greatest importance that the Organization's communications media should concentrate their attention on the fight against poverty and against illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, as well as on promoting rich countries' assistance to poor countries in the area of sustainable development and fostering the economy, with a view to reducing poverty, creating new jobs for young people and exploiting the resources of developing countries.

11. The Department of Public Information should play an active role in the dissemination of information aimed at channelling humanitarian assistance to victims of natural disasters. Attention should also be given to the victims of conflicts and wars which were devastating the underdeveloped areas of the world, in addition to encouraging donor countries and their organizations to provide assistance to a large segment of the world's population in the form of shelter, food and medicine.

12. Lastly, he commended the reorganization of United Nations information centres and their integration into regional hubs, a process which had to be carried out in consultation with the centres and countries concerned in order to ensure that those centres played complementary roles. It was also essential to integrate and modernize United Nations library services in order to emphasize the importance of their function in the gathering and presentation of data and information, and in that context, the highest priority should be given to opportunities for training in developing countries.

13. **Mr. Khalid** (Pakistan) said that 25 years after the General Assembly had called upon the Committee on Information to consider the question of establishing a new world information and communication order, that objective remained as elusive as before, and the same imbalances in the flow of information were continuing. The developing countries still lacked resources, professional workers and infrastructure facilities. They could not fully disseminate information about their societies, achievements and aspirations because they had to contend with the enormous resources and technological superiority of the developed world's communications media, which had begun to control the flow of information and to influence or distort opinion in other societies. To remove that disparity, it was imperative to determine its underlying causes so as to establish a balanced information system in which the communications media would provide full information about all societies and promote understanding among different cultures and religions. To that end, his delegation wished to request UNESCO to submit to the United Nations Committee on Information in the following year a report on its International Programme for the Development of Communications, a programme designed to strengthen the information infrastructure of developing countries.

14. The United Nations information centres were playing an important role in the dissemination of information about the activities of the system, ascertaining the reaction of the various countries concerning those activities and providing first-hand information on those advances made by the Organization that affected their welfare and development. Consequently the new concept of integrating those information centres into regional hubs in order to economize resources ran counter to the objective of providing information to citizens at their doorsteps, a goal for which it was of the utmost importance to maintain close interaction with the communications media of each country. It would be inappropriate to carry out that restructuring at a time such as the present, when questions were being raised concerning the relevance and prestige of the United Nations and when it was extraordinarily important to provide proper information on the operation, purpose and functioning of the Organization. For all of those reasons, he urged the Department of Public Information to consider the question more carefully and not to pursue its recommendations on such crucial matters without a clear mandate from the Fourth Committee.

15. **Mr. Dev Pant** (Nepal) associated his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and commended the Department of Public Information on the work it had done to improve its image and on the support it had given to peacekeeping and other political missions in enhancing their capacity to disseminate information on their activities. He also commended the Department's outreach programmes aimed at promoting collaboration with larger segments of society through the use of modern and traditional means of communication. In the less advanced countries, such as Nepal, traditional means of communication such as radio and the print media had a significant bearing on the lives of citizens. A shortage of resources and lack of technological know-how hindered the access of peoples to electronic media, and therefore the live-radio project with its worldwide reach was a laudable endeavour on the part of the Department to serve the common man.

16. His delegation welcomed the consultations to implement the proposal to regionalize United Nations information centres and wish to request the Department to ensure that the resources released as a result of such measures were transferred to activities in developing countries, giving priority to the least developed countries. United Nations information centres in the least developed countries required funds to carry out additional activities and to deliver results.

17. His delegation believed that the ongoing reforms were starting to show positive effects. In that context, it hoped that the project to prepare inventory of all the small and field libraries would be completed as planned and that the steps to draw up a master list of core areas of specialization available at United Nations libraries worldwide and to induct the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific as a full partner in the Shared Indexing Programme would be accomplished on time. It also believed that the depository libraries all over the world should be part of that process, so that they could contribute better to the Department's campaign for improving the United Nations information system.

18. Lastly, his delegation shared the concerns raised by many delegations about the growing digital divide, which had widened the gulf between rich and poor countries, lured away the skilled human resources of poor nations and negatively affected the development efforts of the South as a whole. The United Nations had a key role to play in rectifying that anomaly. The World Summit on the Information Society would be an important step forward in that direction.

19. **Ms. Mulamula** (United Republic of Tanzania) associated her delegation with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. She welcomed the report of the Committee on Information on the work of its twenty-fifth session and expressed her appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information for his statement on the advances made in the restructuring and reorientation of the Department of Public Information and to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on questions relating to information.

20. Although much progress had been made in implementing the reform measures designed to improve the effectiveness of the broadcasting of public-information programmes, a great deal still remained to be done in order to ensure that the Department's new mission statement reached those to whom it was addressed, that is to say, the citizens of the world. Any communication strategy should have

systematic feedback machinery to confirm that the message had reached the citizens and also to assure the peoples of the world that the United Nations was listening to them. The Department should be receptive to new ideas in order that it might formulate effective communications strategies. The opinions of peoples were an important element in the formulation, evaluation and implementation of policies. Her Government viewed with approval the work of the Department on the formulation of a management strategy to make a systematic evaluation of the impact of its activities, so as to ensure that the information products and activities of the United Nations reached as wide a public as possible.

21. Her Government attached great importance to the work of the information centres, and particularly to the Dar es Salaam Information Centre, which had, notwithstanding the limited resources at its disposal, been the voice of the United Nations in the field for more than four decades. At that Centre materials and publications of the Department of Public Information had been translated into Kiswahili, the national language, for the benefit of the local population. Some of those materials had also been published on the Centre's website. The translation of United Nations documents was an activity that the Centre could carry out more frequently if it had more resources. Furthermore, the Centre also presided over the monthly meeting of the centres for coordinating United Nations information in her country. That group consisted of information officers and staff of all United Nations agencies and offices, who met every month to harmonize their activities and share their experiences. At present the group was preparing a joint publication in English and Kiswahili.

22. The United Nations should devote more resources to strengthening information activities in the field and in information centres. Those centres required financing and staff levels consistent with their constantly growing tasks and with the challenge posed by information technologies. Running a centre staffed on the basis of general temporary assistance was not the most suitable way to strengthen the Department's information capacity in developing countries. With a view to consolidating the nine information centres of Western Europe into one regional centre and to the consequent release of resources, her Government advocated an equitable distribution of the resources thus released, with special attention to the needs of developing countries and the least developed countries.

23. The development of human and technical resources was vital for improving the information and communication systems in developing countries. Her delegation welcomed the fact that the Department had given special attention to the annual training programme for journalists from developing countries, which was important for strengthening the outreach endeavour. However, much more could be done to increase the participation of a larger number of the least advanced countries, particularly African countries, in those programmes. Unfortunately, the Secretary-General's report contained no information regarding the continuation of that programme; her delegation hoped that the omission was due simply to an oversight.

24. Her delegation noted with satisfaction that the live-radio project had already been consolidated as one of the important traditional multimedia channels for strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization to large audiences in every part of the world. It was particularly pleased to note that United Nations Radio continued to broadcast weekly programmes recorded in Kiswahili, despite the lack of adequate resources.

25. In most of the developing countries, radio continued to be the communications medium most accessible to the majority of the population, especially in rural areas. In Africa, 24 per cent of the population had access to radio, while only 7.8 per cent had television and only 0.6 per cent had access to the Internet. That difficult situation called for United Nations technical assistance in order to improve and develop the radio broadcasting services of the developing countries so that their peoples could have access to United Nations News. Her delegation hoped that the live-radio project would become a permanent element of the Department's activities and was pleased to note that the Department sought to obtain the same amount from the current regular budget for the biennium 2004-2005. She also urged Member States to provide all the support necessary for the approval of the Department's budget estimates.

26. The globalization process had widened the digital divide between developed and developing countries, although it could also be a positive force if the benefits it produced were equitably shared among all nations.

The World Summit on the Information Society would enable the international community to examine in depth the questions relating to the digital divide and outline the path that should be followed.

27. **Mr. Zongo** (Burkina Faso) associated his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The United Nations was, above all, an organization of nations that loved peace, justice and tolerance, and one conceived for securing the well-being of the peoples of the world. Unfortunately, however, those peoples today had a greatly distorted perception of its work. The reverses suffered in recent years, at least with regard to the Organization's image as a mediator, particularly since the war in Iraq, had impaired its prestige. The factors that explained such narrowness of views included ignorance, illiteracy, the digital divide and the inadequacy of communication strategies. His delegation welcomed the fact that the new information and communication strategy would take account of those inadequacies, and it commended the efforts of the Department of Public Information aimed at ensuring that the widest possible public would become aware of, interested in and involved in the activities of the United Nations.

28. In order to support the efforts of the Department to that end, his Government conducted, at the end of each session of the General Assembly, symposia aimed at strengthening dialogue and collaboration between the national public administration and the staff of the United Nations system in Burkina Faso. Those symposia had a very favourable effect on the administration's staff, who benefited from the Organization's contribution to their departments, and on United Nations staff, who gained information on the progress of the Organization's operational activities for development. His Government appreciated the logistical support provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations information centre at Ouagadougou, whose support for the staff, students and organizations of civil society was irreplaceable.

29. Access to new information technologies continued to be difficult for the developing countries, and computers and the Internet were luxury items accessible only to a few wealthy persons. For that reason, his Government favoured the strengthening and optimum utilization of traditional communications media. In that context, it attached special importance to the work done by the Ouagadougou information centre through its support for the agencies in the region and the organizations of civil society.

30. His delegation supported the rationalization policy of the Department of Public Information aimed at making the information centres in the developing countries more operational, but it believed that the regionalization policy should be dealt with case by case, bearing in mind the function of each centre and the realities and needs of the various regions.

31. **Mr. Baatar** (Mongolia) said that his delegation subscribed fully to the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The restructuring of the information centres should be carried out with priority attention to the needs of the developing countries, in close consultation with the Member States concerned.

32. Many developing countries lacked the necessary infrastructure and resources, both in monetary terms and in human resources, to benefit from the rapid advance of information and communication technology. Until the ever-widening digital divide was addressed effectively, traditional information media such as radio continued to be the most widespread and cost-effective means in many developing countries. Mongolia welcomed the application of the live-radio project, since it believed that broadcasts in local languages would unquestionably make that endeavour more effective.

33. His delegation also hoped that every possible measure would be taken to close the digital divide between the developed and the developing countries. The United Nations, through its Department of Public Information, could play an important role in achieving that goal, so that developing countries might benefit from the global revolution in information technology. The World Summit on the Information Society would be an important milestone in the international community's efforts to bridge that divide.

34. The Department of Public Information could learn from the best practices of other international organizations. The International Committee of the Red Cross, for example, issued an annual review of its activities in the form of a 20-minute television documentary. A brief but multifaceted presentation of the activities and achievements of the United Nations in implementing the Millennium goals could increase the effectiveness and the impact of the Organization's

information products and services. In that regard, his delegation believed that in those countries in which no information centres existed, the information services of United Nations offices could play a pivotal role in disseminating information. He also stressed the need for a strict observance of multilingualism. However, in many developing countries the official languages of the United Nations were not spoken, and other new and imaginative strategies must be used to deliver the Organization's message to the general public, for example by using websites in local languages, in close cooperation with local communications media and civil society.

35. **Mr. Kanaan** (Organization of the Islamic Conference) said that the world was witnessing an astronomical leap in new information and communication technology, whose institutions were also growing constantly and whose benefits were spreading into all spheres of human learning. Modern communications media had assumed growing responsibility in the shaping of societal values, cultures, structures and future directions.

36. He commended the Department of Public Information for the important role it played and the efforts it was making in various fields; he believed that there were a number of questions that deserved the Department's support and attention. On the issue of human rights, the Secretary-General, in his report on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration (A/58/323), had warned that tolerance was too often the first casualty of a "war on terror", widely perceived, especially by Muslims, as a war against Islam. In that context, he wished to refer to the Secretary-General's note (A/58/318) entitled "Education and public information activities in the field of human rights", which highlighted the role of Member States and of regional and international organizations and institutions in supporting national initiatives and strategies for human-rights education for their implementation through partnerships among effective actors.

37. The question of dialogue among civilizations should be regarded as a continuous subject and a permanent issue constantly present on the international scene, not limited to one year only, and therefore the Department should continue supporting that issue in order that the achievements of the United Nations in that area might not be lost among a myriad of events.

38. The Department should continue its annual training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries in order to enhance their professional capabilities and help them acquire in-depth knowledge of the work of the United Nations and its related organizations. In that connection, the Department deserved praise for renaming its annual training programme for young journalists in honour of Reham Al-Farra, one of the staff members who had died in the terrorist attack against the Baghdad headquarters of the United Nations in August.

39. Inasmuch as the Government of Israel continued its inhumane military campaign against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories, it was imperative for the United Nations to exert more efforts in shouldering its responsibility relating to the question of Palestine, including responsibility in the field of information, until such time as a solution that was just in all its aspects was achieved. The Organization of the Islamic Conference commended the Department of Public Information for its special programme designed to enhance public awareness on the question of Palestine. The convening in New York in September 2002 and September 2003 of the International Conference on Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People, under the theme "End the Occupation", deserved appreciation and commendation.

40. At the tenth session of its Summit, held at Putrajaya, Malaysia on 16 and 17 October 2003, the Islamic Conference had highlighted the significant role that should be played by the information and communication sector, particularly in the light of the exacerbation of the premeditated campaigns tarnishing the image of Islam and Muslims in some parts of the world; that role should be fulfilled by propagating the noble message of Islam founded on peace, tolerance, dialogue and interaction with other civilizations. The Conference had approved the proposal made by the President of Senegal for the establishment by the Conference of a solidarity fund for digital technologies in order to bridge the existing gap between developed and developing countries.

41. The Conference had also agreed to implement a plan of action that would include dialogue with other cultures and civilizations, including the West. The Troika of the Conference's Summit and the Friends of the Chair (Malaysia) would represent the Organization of the Islamic Conference in that dialogue. It had

further decided to establish programmes for collaboration between Member States in the deployment of information and communication technology for development based on the "smart partnership" principle in which Governments, communities and the private sector would be fully engaged.

42. The Conference had also requested Member States to enhance coordination for their participation in the World Summit on the Information Society in its two phases and called on them to draw up concepts and features for information in consonance with the principles and aspirations of Islamic societies to achieve progress, development and prosperity for all peoples.

43. **Mr. Requeijo** (Cuba), exercising the right of reply to what he described as the aggressive intervention of the representative of the United States of America, said that his delegation did not seek to politicize the subject of questions relating to information but instead wished to denounce the aggression to which Cuba was being subjected on the pretext of bringing information, or more precisely disinformation, to his country. The subjects mentioned by the representative of the United States, which should not have been taken up, were the factors politicizing the debate, and for that reason some clarifications were needed.

44. The representative of the United States not only had not answered the points raised by Cuba but had once again resorted to outmoded arguments to attack the social system that the Cuban people had built for itself without foreign intervention and in full exercise of self-determination, a fact that had troubled the Government of the United States for almost 45 years. Why did Cuba find itself obliged to denounce and interfere with the discredited and misnamed Radio Martí when it was not doing the same with the hundreds of broadcasters from other countries that could be heard in Cuba? Why was it not interfering with United Nations radio but was instead cooperating with that medium and rebroadcasting its programmes through various Cuban stations? Cuba's action reflected not a fear of the ideas being propagated but rather a righteous repudiation of falsehoods and slanders against the Cuban people.

45. The persons mentioned by the representative of the United States had been arrested or tried not for expressing their opinions but for working over a period of years for a hostile foreign Power, receiving precise instructions on how they should act and also receiving material and financial support from the Government of the United States and from extreme rightist Cuban-American groups to subvert the Cuban internal order and to damage the economic, political and social system that the people exercising its sovereignty and self-determination, had fully adopted. Those persons had been trying to re-establish the United States protectorate over the pseudo-Republic of Cuba before 1959, had committed serious violations of Cuban laws and had, by acting for a foreign Power, betrayed the most legitimate interests of his country. The persons implicated in such crimes had been tried before courts established with all guarantees in conformity with Cuba's Constitution and current legislation. Cuban courts were serious institutions and not the spectacles referred to by the representative of the United States, who could consult the penal code of the United States if he wished to see how severely such criminal activity was punished in his own country.

46. The representative of the United States had referred to a statement made on 7 April 2003 by the Director-General of UNESCO, which had been based on manipulated and deceptive information provided by some of his advisers. As Cuba had already pointed out at the meetings of the Committee on Information, where the United States delegation had used the same quotation, Mr. Matsuura had apologized on two occasions for that lamentable situation, and his apologies had been accepted with full courtesy by the Cuban authorities. Mr. Matsuura surely would not feel flattered to know of the attempt to use him for spurious purposes.

47. His delegation wished to express its surprise at the United States delegation's blatant rejection of Cuba's call for the establishment of a new international information order. If that delegation had paid due attention to what was proposed in the Committee by a substantial number of delegations, it would have been aware that that call had been repeated in the Committee chamber during the three days of debate. The Cuban delegation always spoke the truth, with total freedom to express it, and that was annoying to some people.

48. **Mr. Brown** (United States of America), exercising the right of reply, said that the representative of Cuba had exercised a right which was denied to Cuban citizens in his own country. The

response of the Cuban Government to 75 citizens who had dared to speak up for their human rights and fundamental freedoms had been to sentence them to more than 1,400 years of prison, and that was only the most recent example of how the Castro dictatorship had oppressed the Cuban people for almost 50 years.

49. **Mr. Requeijo** (Cuba), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, expressed regret that the representative of the United States had left the chamber, an action he regarded as showing lack of respect not only for the Cuban delegation but also for the work of the Committee. Using crude language of a kind not used in the Committee was also a sign of disrespect. It was possible to have differences of views or opinions, but good manners must be maintained, since otherwise there could be no dialogue, understanding or communication.

50. **Mr. Coelho** (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Working Group on Informatics, said that in recent years a technical subgroup of the Working Group had been addressing the question of connections between Member States and the United Nations Secretariat at Headquarters in order to enhance interaction on practical questions relating to the use of information technology in the work of the United Nations. In that spirit, the Working Group had played a useful role in the continuous improvement of information technology services and training that were provided to delegations at Headquarters and included the provision and maintenance of personal computers in the conference areas for use by delegations, broader availability of official documents through the Internet, website hosting services provided by the Secretariat to Member States, increased access for Member States to specialized databases of interest to them, and the development of training programmes provided by the Secretariat and others for Member States in the use of various information- technology services.

51. He wished to present a practical tool that representatives could use in their everyday work. It was Internet Services for Delegates, a booklet intended as a guide to the information-technology services already available, which also provided useful advice that could help representatives take full advantage of the Internet-based tools, services and resources provided by the Secretariat.

52. Another project being prepared by the Working Group was a software programme that would enable representatives, if they wished, to download onto their Personal Digital Assistants such practical data as the Daily Journal and other topical information relating to their work at the United Nations and was being prepared at the initiative of the delegation of Andorra.

53. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the debate had raised a number of issues that he would like to clear up in his final comments. Making the Department of Public Information the public voice of the Organization required, as the Chairman of the Committee on Information had said, not only a good plan and leadership but also the political and material support of Member States.

54. The representatives of Tunisia and Egypt had stressed the importance of the relationship between the Department and the Committee on Information, and the Department would continue to be guided by the recommendations and norms of that Committee. The relations of the Department with the Committee on Information were excellent, but the Department would not rest on it laurels. With regard to the suggestion that the Bureau of that Committee should be informed about the work of the Department between sessions, he was looking forward with interest to discussing with the Bureau how that could be achieved. The Chairman of the Committee on Information had maintained periodic contacts with the Department, continuing the practice established by his predecessor.

55. To illustrate the relationship between the Committee on Information and the Department, he said that the Chairman of that Committee had accepted the Department's invitation to participate in the World Electronic Media Forum, a meeting which paralleled the World Summit on the Information Society and had been organized by the Department in association with the television industry and the Government of Switzerland. In the Forum the representatives of communications media would discuss questions relating to freedom of the press and responsibility in the electronic age, the independence of communications media, the importance of pluralism in information sources and the question of imbalance in the flow of information, an issue raised by the representative of Pakistan.

56. He expressed satisfaction that the representative of Tunisia, one of the host countries of the Summit, and the representative of Algeria had said that the

World Summit on the Information Society provided an opportunity to prepare practical means for closing the digital divide, as the delegation of Burkina Faso had also said.

57. A number of delegations had spoken of the urgent need to ensure that the new information and communication technologies would be used for the benefit of development, and he was in full agreement on that issue. The representative of Italy, speaking on behalf of the European Union, and the representative of the United States of America had emphasized the importance of freedom of expression; some Member States had expressed concern that the World Summit, instead of reaffirming the importance of freedom of the press, might attempt to limit that fundamental right. The Department of Public Information had been working at various levels to reaffirm the need for establishing at the Summit international standards relating to freedom of expression, and that essentially implied reaffirming article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That principle had also been reaffirmed in various regional declarations; the best known was the Windhoek Declaration of 3 May 1991, which the General Assembly had endorsed by proclaiming 3 May World Press Freedom Day.

58. In his statements made at Telecom World 2003 at Geneva, in the Second Committee on 23 October 2003, on newspaper opinion pages and in interviews, he had endeavoured to stress the importance of having the Summit support freedom of the press, opinion and expression, since those, as the General Assembly had affirmed, were fundamental freedoms.

59. The free exchange of information was becoming more and more important in development assistance and the relief of poverty, and any attempt to limit those freedoms would force away the communications media, which were fundamental participants in the efforts to take maximum advantage of the benefits associated with the use of information and communication technologies and to reduce the problems arising from such use.

60. He shared the distress expressed by a number of delegations at incidents of violence against journalists; the death of Jean Hélène, a correspondent of Radio France International, at Abidjan the preceding week was yet another tragic example of violence against those who were working to keep the world informed. A more positive event had been the release of the four journalists kidnapped the preceding Sunday in Guatemala together with three other persons.

61. The representatives who had stressed the importance of information and communication technologies for the benefit of development would be pleased to know that the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force, had helped to transform the World Summit on the Information Society from an event concentrating on new information technologies to a much broader summit whose main components would include questions relating to development and communications media. As the draft final document, the draft declaration of principles and the draft plan of action clearly showed, development was one of the central questions to be considered at the Summit.

62. Responding to a concern voiced by the Group of 77 and China, he expressed satisfaction at the important role being given to the Department of Public Information in the promotion of sustainable development, and he stated that the Department was collaborating closely with the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development in formulating a communications strategy for the next two years that would concentrate on water, sanitation and human settlements. Furthermore, in response to another concern expressed in that same statement, he affirmed that 24 per cent of the users of the United Nations website were Internet users from developing countries, although there were probably many more who gained access through providers in other countries or servers which did not use any country designation.

63. The search for peace in the Middle East was one of the highest priorities of the United Nations, and therefore of the Department. Among other examples, he mentioned the creation of a coordinating centre for communications media in Arabic, a seminar for international information media on peace in the Middle East held at Seville, Spain, the annual training programme that the Department provided for Palestinian professionals in the communications media, and the five weeks of practical training in audiovisual production and information which had been provided for ten Palestinian journalists.

64. Responding to the Mongolian proposal on the possibility of producing an annual documentary on the work of the United Nations, he said that the

Department was already producing such a documentary and was distributing it to television broadcasters all over the world.

65. He welcomed with particular pleasure the fact that delegations had expressed satisfaction at the enormous efforts made by the Department to promote multilingualism. The six official languages were being used in the information provided by the News Centre, the website of the Department's programme entitled The UN Works and, in large measure, on the website of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, as well as in the UN Chronicle and on the United Nations television channel and United Nations Radio, which also broadcast in Portuguese and Kiswahili. Similarly, the Department provided guided tours in 20 languages, and the information centres were producing documentation printed in 28 languages, radio programmes in seven, and television broadcasts in 14, besides maintaining websites in 31 different languages.

66. The Department wished to provide more information in the six official languages but was prevented from doing so by to lack of resources. Although Member States took for granted the allocation of resources for the translation of meeting documents into the six official languages, that was not the case for United Nations publications. There would come a time when that situation could no longer be maintained; nevertheless, the search for innovative solutions to achieve greater linguistic parity would continue.

67. With regard to the needs of Africa, he said that the Department was carrying out a worldwide multimedia programme with a view to strengthening support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and was working with the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa and the NEPAD secretariat in forming a global and integrated strategy designed to promote support for NEPAD at all levels. As examples of the Department's efforts to promote an understanding of the subjects that were of concern to NEPAD, he mentioned the publication Africa Recovery and its website; United Nations Radio, which devoted 80 per cent of its broadcasts to the African continent; and the News Centre, which devoted a great part of its information to that subject.

68. In the process of regionalization of the information centres, the Department would consult the Member States concerned and take advantage of the experience acquired during the creation of the Brussels regional centre, but always bearing in mind the special circumstances of developing countries and those of each specific region. Similarly, attention would be given to the opinions expressed by Member States during the current session. The assets released as a result of the closing of the nine Western European information centres would be used to strengthen the information centres of the cities hosting the regional centres. In order to put an end to the concentration of managing staff in the developed countries, three posts in the D-1 category would be transferred from Western Europe to key centres in the regions of the developing countries in which there were no staff members in that category. The basic purpose of that new focus was not to save resources but to seek greater effectiveness that would enable the information centres to have the desired impact. He shared the concern of the United Republic of Tanzania about the shortage of resources allocated to the information centres, but in the light of the prevailing budgetary climate, he had little hope that the amount would be increased.

69. In connection with the proposal to give the Dag Hammarskjöld Library a leading role in the recently created Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries, he said that the Library was already participating in the seven subcommittees and was chairing three of them. The Library and the Department intended to improve library services inter alia by the creation of shared access through the Internet and improved delivery of documents. In that regard, he ensured the representative of Switzerland that the Department had no intention to reduce the role of the Geneva Library; what was needed was simply to put the benefits of the individual libraries at the service of everyone.

70. He took note of the comment of the representative of the United States concerning the UN Chronicle (A/C.4/58/SR.15) but recalled that that publication, which during the past two years had been modernized and also had an Internet edition and a number of electronic services, was intended not for delegates but for secondary schools and universities. Nevertheless, the impact of that publication, as well as that of the Department's other products, would be thoroughly reassessed.

71. **Mr. Ballestero** (Costa Rica) expressed concern about the internal operation of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, particularly the well-known difficulty of

finding documents. In an organization as large as the United Nations, it was basic to centralize documents and have a clear idea of who issued them and where they could be found. For that reason, his delegation appealed to the Department of Public Information to improve the system of document filing and wished to know what steps were being taken to facilitate delegate access to United Nations documents.

72. **Mr. Assaf** (Lebanon) inquired whether United Nations television broadcasts could be seen in New York outside of Manhattan. Time Warner Cable asserted that they could not. If that was a fact, he wished to know what steps the Department of Public Information had taken in the matter.

73. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) expressed regret at the dissatisfaction of the representative of Costa Rica with the way in which the Dag Hammarskjöld Library was being utilized and said that he would request the Chief Librarian to meet with him and serve as an expert who could resolve his doubts and problems, which were no doubt shared by other delegations. Replying to the representative of Lebanon, he said that the United Nations television channel could be seen in only some areas of Manhattan, since it was a service provided gratis by Time Warner Cable to the United Nations and was limited to providing live daily programmes and, occasionally, United Nations material for its broadcasts. Unfortunately, expanding the service would require resources which the United Nations did not have available. Nevertheless, the Department was providing copious material free of charge to a great variety of national and international television broadcasters. In that connection he encouraged Governments that could do so to promote an increase in the percentage of United Nations material broadcast by their countries' television systems and to contact the Division of News and Information Media, which would be glad to provide, either free of charge or at cost, audiovisual material for more extensive broadcasting.

Adoption of measures on draft resolution A, "Information at the service of humanity"; draft resolution B, "Public information policies and activities of the United Nations"; and the draft decision entitled "Increasing the number of members of the Committee on Information" (A/58/21, chap. V)

74. The Chairman said that if there was no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to approve the draft resolutions and the draft decision by consensus and without submitting them to a vote.

75. *It was so decided.*

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76. **The Chairman** said that if there was no objection he would take it that the Committee adopted the conclusions and recommendations appearing in the section on programme 23, "Public Information", of chapter III.B of the report.

77. *It was so decided.*

78. **The Chairman** announced that the Committee had completed its consideration of agenda item 86.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.